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Answering Your Question: Calvinism and Reformed

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Answering Your Question: Calvinism and Reformed

Abstract

"Reformed' is a larger umbrella term encompassing a strand of thought and church history that emerged in Christianity as a result of the Protestant Reformation."

Posting about terms used to define belief systems from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/answering-your-question-calvinism-and-reformed/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Answering Your Question: Calvinism and Reformed

 inallthings.org/answering-your-question-calvinism-and-reformed/

Neal DeRoo

I see a lot of terms about “Reformed” used interchangeably, but I am not so sure they do all mean the same thing and was hoping you could explain them. Terms I see are: Calvinism, Reformed, Neo-Calvinism, Neo-Reformed, and New Calvinism. There may be others—but these are just off the top of my head.—Kelly

The difficulty in answering a question like this lies in the fact that, as you said, people use the terms more or less interchangeably, which means that defining each one precisely is difficult: do you define them according to how people use them? If so, which people? Do you define them according to how they should be defined? If so, according to which standard? In general, I’ll try to keep it short, and define them in broad strokes, in ways that I think most people who self-identify with that label would be comfortable with. If you aren’t, please say so in the comments.

Alright, here we go:

Calvinism: in general, anything that flows out of the life and work of John Calvin. This can be used theologically and denominationally.

Theologically, Calvinism focuses on the sovereignty and power of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, and on the need of every creature to be in relationship with that God. Theological Calvinism is often (if somewhat unfairly) summarized by the acronym [TULIP](#).

Denominationally, Calvinism refers to any organized group of churches that traces an historical lineage to Calvinist theology and polity. The church governance structure tends to focus on the elders (not the pastor) as the leaders of the local congregation; local congregations are accountable to regional groupings, which send delegates to national meetings. Due to historical development, some churches that are denominationally Calvinist no longer reflect a Calvinist church structure, and others are only minimally theologically Calvinist (if at all). In turn, some non-Calvinist denominations can be theologically Calvinist (e.g., some southern Baptists are theologically Calvinist).

Neo-Calvinist: those following in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper. While affirming much of the Calvinist tradition, they tend to focus more on the “T” of TULIP, considering the ‘total’ nature of sin to be a matter of scope (everything in creation is affected by sin) rather than depth (there is no goodness left in creation). This, in turn, implies that all parts of creation ([every square inch](#))—as well as all parts of human living—are in need of redemption and sanctification. This provides an impetus for Christians to engage meaningfully in culturally transformative (or re-formative) actions. Contemporary examples include [James K.A. Smith](#) and [Tim Keller](#).

New Calvinism: a [recent revival of Calvinist](#) thought with a heavy focus on: a) the sovereignty of God over matters pertaining to personal salvation (captured succinctly in the term “[predestination](#)”); and b) [complementarian](#) gender roles. They tend to focus more on the “U” and “L” of TULIP, claiming that God alone decides who will spend eternity in heaven and who will spend eternity in hell. Some contemporary examples include John Piper and Mark Driscoll.

Reformed: Despite how it is often used, [Reformed is not equivalent to Calvinist](#). Rather, 'Reformed' is a larger umbrella term encompassing a strand of thought and church history that emerged in Christianity as a result of the Protestant Reformation. In this sense, key "Reformed" figures beyond Calvin include Luther, Knox, Zwingli, and others. Some would also include pre-Reformation 'reformed' thinkers such as Hus and Wycliffe. In general, Reformed theology affirms the five "solas": sola fide (by faith alone), sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone), sola Christus (by Christ alone), sola gratia (by grace alone), and soli deo Gloria (to God alone be the glory). Taken together, these present a vision of Christianity grounded primarily in the actions of God (not of humanity), as revealed in the Scriptures, incarnated in Jesus Christ, and enacted in the lives of God's people through justification (by faith) and sanctification (by the Spirit).

Neo-Reformed: another name given to the **new Calvinism** tradition, explained above. Because the determinative focus of this group seems to be largely on its theory of individual predestination, as well as an account of complementarian gender roles it sees inscribed within creation itself, some people claim that the neo-reformed group should be [called something else](#), with neo-Calvinist ([but that names already taken](#)), [neo-Puritan](#), and [neo-Fundamentalist](#) being the main alternatives. In general, though, **New Calvinist** seems to be the name with the most widely-held acceptance.

Reformational: where "Reformed" tends to refer to points of theology (5 solas) or historical development (post-Reformation Protestantism), reformational refers to a way of living out Christianity that appeals to the creation-wide scope of the Gospel story (succinctly captured in the creation-fall-redemption-consummation paradigm) to call for the life-wide application of one's Christian commitments: everything in my life should be affected by my relationship with Christ. This term is often used interchangeably with "Kuyperian" or "neo-Calvinist", but this is not entirely accurate: not all Reformational Christians come from Kuyperian, or even Calvinist, backgrounds. N.T. Wright is one prominent figure who could easily be described as "Reformational," but is not part of a Calvinist tradition.